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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION CLOSES GAP ON RUDD

REF: CANBERRA 560

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Following yesterday's announcement by Peter Costello (reftel), the good news continues for Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull. The bi-weekly Newspoll shows the Coalition in its strongest position since Kevin Rudd became Prime Minister in December 2007. The ALP's lead over the Coalition has fallen to 53-47 (in two party preferred terms), its lead on the primary vote has fallen to 41-40 and Turnbull's approval rating has improved. Since the last Newspoll, there was a Ministerial reshuffle triggered by the resignation of Joel Fitzgibbon as Defense Minister. END SUMMARY.

GAP CLOSES

¶2. (U) The ALP's formidable lead on two party preferred terms has fallen from 55-45 two weeks ago to 53-47, and its lead on the primary vote has fallen from 43-38 to 41-40. These are the Opposition's best results since Rudd became Prime Minister in December 2007. Previously, the Opposition's best results were 54/46 on the two party preferred and 39 on the primary vote. It is the Rudd government's equal worst primary vote, and its slimmest primary vote lead. At the 2007 election, the two party preferred vote was 52.7-47.3 and the primary vote was 43.3-42.1.

APPROVAL FOR TURNBULL RISES

¶3. (U) Turnbull's net approval rose to plus seven, continuing an improvement since it fell into negative territory in April. However, Rudd's big lead as preferred Prime Minister was virtually unchanged at 57/25, and his net approval rating rose four points to plus 27.

GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR TURNBULL

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The polls, Fitzgibbon's resignation; growing media resentment of Rudd's "spin"; the debate over government debt; union anger at Rudd; and Costello's announcement have combined to provide Turnbull with a renewed glimmer of hope. The Newspoll only puts the Coalition where it was when it lost the 2007 election, but Turnbull has at last seen some movement in his direction. The question is how durable this uptick in the Opposition's popularity will be. END COMMENT.